Extinction threat to bird species

*42. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Bombay Natural History Society and Bird Life International have cautioned that the number of bird species threatened with extinction in India is rising at an alarming rate;

(b) whether these bodies have stated that endangered birds, which need to be protected, are pink, headed duck, forest owlet, jerdon's courser, Himalayan mountain qualis, Sarus, crane and two species of vultures; and

(c) if so, what steps Government are taking to protect these birds?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) to (c) A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) Several organizations including Bombay Natural History Society, Bird Life International have been expressing concerns about decline in population of several bird species in India.

(b) Pink headed duck and the Himalayan mountain quail were last sighted in 1935 and 1876 respectively. These birds are since considered extinct. Jerdon's courser was also considered extinct, but was rediscovered by Bombay Natural History Society in Cuddapah Region of Andhra Pradesh in 1986. The State Government has notified the crucial habitat of the species as Sri Lankamalleswara Sanctuary for providing effective protection to the species.

Forest Spotted Owlet (Anthene blewitti) is also a rare species of bird, which is endemic to Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. Very little information is available about current status of the species. Bombay Natural History Society is conducting "Ecological Studies" on this species.

Although Saras Crane is not a species threatened with

extinction, there has been decline of population of this species due to decrease in the number and extent of wet lands, use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and chemically treated seeds.

There has also been a sharp decline in the population of different species of vultures. An International workshop was organized by Bombay Natural History Society with the support of Central Government to take stock of current situation and evolve an effective strategy for the conservation of vultures. The main recommendation of the Workshop are as follows:—

(i) Need for survey of vultures throughout the country.

(ii) Study ecological and environmental factors responsible for decline of vultures population.

(iii) Disease and Toxicological studies among the sick vultures.

(iv) *Ex-situ* conservation measures.

(c) Some of the impotant steps taken by the Central Government to protect Jerdon's Courser, Forest Spotted Owlet, Sarus, Crane and Vultures are as follows:—

(i) Hunting of all wild animals and birds has been banned under Wildlife (Protection) Act.

(ii) Crucial habitats of various species of wild animals and birds have been notified as national parks and sanctuaries. Important national parks and sanctuaries are also notified as Ramsar Sites and World Natural Heritage Sites.

(iii) Regular patrolling of the area to control poaching and illegal trade in wild animals and their products is done. Cooperation of other enforcement agencies and international organizations is also taken in this regard.

(iv) Management of the Wildlife Habitats is done on scientific lines, allowing in national parks and sanctuaries only such activities which are for betterment of Wildlife.

(v) Financial assistance is provided to State Government for effective management of national parks and sanctuaries.

(vi) Support scientific research for monitoring the population status of various species and evolving strategies for *in-situ* and *ex-situ* conservation of various species.

(vii) Transfer of technology to field managers through training and workshops.

(viii) Create awareness about the importance of Wildlife conservation.

(ix) Action to implement the recommendations of the International Workshop on vultures has been initiated.

(x) Various recommendations for Wildlife conservation was recently made at the meeting of State Minister of Environment and Forests held at Coimbatore on 29th and 30th January, 2000 and implementation of these recommendations known as, "Coimbatore Charter" will go a long way in mitigating many of the existing problems.

SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Sir, I have gone through the reply given by the hon. Minister. Fifteen per cent of the about 9000-odd species of birds in the world are available in this country. India takes the fifth place in this line. According to the figures that are available, India has got 79 species of threatened birds. This was the report given by the Mega-diversity Country Data. Then we had the news of some deer being killed in some parts of Rajasthan. Then came the news of elephants being killed by poachers in the Corbett Park and recently, we had the news of the poisoning of 14 saras cranes in the Bharatpur park Every day, there is news about the killing or the death of animals in captivity in national parks and

forests. Sir, while it is not my intention to unnecessarily blame the officers of the Ministry of Environment, I would like to say that despite the steps listed in part (c) of the reply, something is missing somewhere. Maybe the guards at the grass-root level are suffering from lack of infrastructure or they may not be in a position to pay much attention to the protection of the animals for which they are being paid. Sir, I would, therefore, like to know what have been the reasons why one after the other, there have been reports about the killing of one or the other species of animals. In view of the caution received from the Bombay Natural History Society and the Bird Life Intenational with regard to the increase in the number of bird species being threatened with extinction—particularly with regard to the species mentioned in my question, the pink-headed duck, forest owlet, Jerdon's courser, Himalayan mountain quails and saras crane—I would like to know the steps the Government is proposing to take to protect them. Has the Government got any machinery to conduct a survey as to how many species are extinct and how many are on the verge of extinction? I would also like to make a suggestion in this regard to the Government. Around 10,000 are, perhaps, involved in live bird business. On one occasion, the earlier Minister has given the reply, "I cannot take away the livelihood of 10,000 people from this activity". My request is to provide some alternative and provide some captive breeds so that it can cater to the market also while the birds can be saved. My first supplementary is whether the Government propose to review the Wild Life Conservation Policy with practical solutions and policy commitments and take urgent steps to conserve wild life as degraded forests and rising pollution levels need urgent corrective measures to safeguard the precious heritage. What specific actions are being taken in this regard?

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Sir, there are 9946 species the world over and 1228 species are in India. The world over, 1183 species are threatened. As far as India is concerned, only 70 are threatened. Compared to the figure of 12 per cent of threatened species the world over, in India it is only six per cent. The International Union for

Nature Conservation, Bird Life International, a UK-based NGO, the World Conservation and Monitoring Centre, another UK-based NGO, and the Bombay Natural History Society are providing information as to how many birds are living, how many bird species are extinct, how many are endangered and how many are critically endangered. As far as the counting of birds is concerned, it is humanly not possible. But, at the same time, we have to preserve the wet lands. Because of on-going human activities, industrialisation, wet lands have shrunk like anything. It is for everybody, it is for the Government as also for the other organisations, to see that wet lands are preserved. Because of high-rise buildings and because of various electrical installations, etc., migratory birds turn, divert and go away. The Government is very much concious of the need to see that protection of birds is very much ensured. We are conducting periodical workshops. Even recently, we had conducted a workshop. We get feedback from our own NGO in Bombay and various other organisations. We cannot count the number. It is only hearsay that just by sighting we can say whether the number of birds has increased or decreased.

SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: My request is that the Government should evolve a mechanism whereby it is able to conduct a survey. Even the wild animals are being surveyed. So what is the difficulty in the case of birds? What is the constraint in conducting a survey in the case of birds?

SHRI T.R. BAALU: It is humanly impossible. There is no technology or any such thing available with us for physically counting every-bird.

SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: My second supplementary is...

MR. CHAIRMAN: It is the third now!

SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: No, Sir. I only made a suggestion...*(Interruption)*... That was a suggestion.

Sir, the Jerdon's courser was sighted in Andhra Pradesh after a gap of several decades. What steps have been taken to protect the bird and allow it to breed till the numbers reach some sort of a safety level to ensure its survival?

SHRI T.R. BAALU: The former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Shri N.T. Rama Rao, used to call the Jerdon's courser as *Telugu Bitta* because, till 1986, it was understood that the Jerdon's coursers were extinct, but, suddenly, in 1986, the Bombay Natural History Society had identified that some particular birds, some species of birds, were alive, and that they were also sighted in the Cuddapah area in Andhra Pradesh.

SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: It is my native place.

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Yes, it is your native place. It was called the pride of Andhra Pradesh. A particular area, the Sri Lankamalleswara area, has been declared as a sanctuary, and an area of 464 sq. kms. has been identified. The late lamented leader, hon. N.T. Rama Rao, was very much interested in the conservation of this particular bird. In 1997-98, we had provided Rs. 1.5 lakhs, and in 1999-2000, we had provided Rs. 7.4 lakhs for the conservation of critically endangered birds.

DR. KARAN SINGH: Mr. Chairman, Sir, this question has raised the broader problem of rapid deforestation and degradation of our environment. Thirty-four years ago, I became the Chairman of the Indian Board for Wildlife, and at that time, certain surveys were conducted with regard to animals and birds, and the afforested area in India. The figures that we were given then turned out to be incorrect, because, with satellite technology, it is now possible to map, more accurately how much is the forest cover in India, and it has shown an alarming decrease in the course of the last 20-25 years as a result of various factors—population growth, urbanisation, unplanned development and illegal ingress into bird sanctuaries and other restricted areas.

Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister what steps the Government is taking to ensure that the forest coverage in the country gets back to its original percentage. This is not something which the Government of India alone can do. Essentially, it is something which the State Governments have got to be involved in. Mr. Minister, do you have concrete measures whereby you are able

to recreate the forest cover or conserve whatever wetlands we have because the animals and birds will naturally disappear if the forest cover or the wetlands disappear? Do you realise the urgency of the problem? Do you appreciate the fact that if this present trend continues, within the next 15 or 20 years, we might lose our entire forest cover? And what steps do you intend to take to prevent this?

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Sir, as per the Forest Survey of India, 2000, the forest cover has increased to 38965 sq. kilometers. The dense forest has increased and the degraded forest has decreased by 10,000 sq. kilometres. At the same time, we have got a 20-years Forestry Action Plan. According to this plan, we require around Rs. 6,000 crores to be spent in a particular financial year, whereas our spending, by the State Governments as well as the Central Government, is Rs. 1,860 crores. Therefore, we have to put our heads together and see to it that the forest cover is increased. Sir, we are taking enough care to see that development is hormonised with conservation.

DR. (SMT.) JOYASREE GOSWAMI MAHANTA: Sir, being a life member of the Bombay Natural History Society and being a student of environment and zoology, I feel that it is very much needed these days to protect the endangered species both aerial, arboreal and in the wetland. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether the Government has taken any steps for artificial breeding of these endangered species with the help of any scientific method to preserve such heritage.

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Sir, as such, there is no artificial method to breed these species. At the same time, we do give finances. Where there is water shortage, we do advise the State Government, the concerned sanctuaries and the National Parks to see that the underground water is tapped. When the State Government asks for any funds, we assist them to see that artificial water points are provided in the habitats of particular species.

SHRI C.P. THIRUNAVUKKARASU: Sir, yesterday, I read a news-item in the Hindu. I would like to read it. It says, "At least 21

peacocks were found dead in Sikar district following bacterial infection, forest officials said on Wednesday. The carcasses of 11 peacocks were recovered from the village Khirod and 10 from the village Kudan in the district during the last 24 hours. The post mortem conducted on two birds found dead in Chachiwad Bada village last week revealed that they had been suffering from pneumonitis and gastroenteritis." Even in Tamil Nadu in the Viralimalai Hill where you can find lal murgas, peacocks are dying everyday. So, what steps are being taken by the Government to prevent the extinction of these beautiful peacocks—peacock is a national bird—in Jaipur and Tamil Nadu. Recently, we have seen that in Andhra Pradesh some endangered birds have been killed for hosting a party by a political party. I would like to know whether any action has been taken against the persons who are responsible for it?

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Sir, in the Viralimalai Hills in Tamil Nadu no such incident has taken place. The hon. Member might have been informed wrongly. Probably, the hon. Member from Pondicherry is a frequent visitor to that place. The peacocks are hale and hearty because visitors like Shri C.P. Thirunavukkarasu feed them quite often. Sir, so far as the death of 21 peacocks in Sikar District in Rajasthan is concerned, these peacocks died because of consumption of seeds treated mercury salts. Here the farmers sow the seeds in their fields, but they do not cover them quickly. The farmers are advised to cover the soil very quickly. And they have also been advised to create water holes in the vicinity of the fields so that the peacocks can easily drink the water and save their life.

SHRI C.P. THIRUNAVUKKARASU: What about the involvement of certain political parties in a particular incident in Andhra Pradesh?

SHRI T.R. BAALU: The Government has not received any report on any such incident.

श्री कृपाल परमार: सभापति जी, मैं आपके माध्यम से माननीय मंत्री जी से जानना चाहता हूं कि हमारे देश में वाइल्ड लाइफ प्रोटेक्शन ऐक्ट लागू है। इसके बावजूद भी वन्य

प्राणियों की गिनती में कमी आ रही है और लगातार उनकी हत्याएं हो रही हैं जिसके कारण लगता है कि यह कानून पूरे तरीके से लागू नहीं किया जा रहा है। मैं माननीय मंत्री जी से जानना चाहूंगा कि पिछले दो सालों में इस ऐक्ट के तहत कितने लोगों के खिलाफ मुकदमे चलाए गए और उनमें से कितने लोगों को सजा हुई है?

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Sir, recently, one such incident was reported in the Pillibhit district of Uttar Pradesh wherein a tiger was found killed allegedly due to poisoning. But it could not be identified whether it died due to poisoning or otherwise. Of course, there have been cases of poaching and the CBI is already investigating the matter. Again, in Hyderabad, one tiger was killed. The Government of Andhra Pradesh is taking appropriate action, and the police investigation is going on. Also, recently, in the Jim Corbett area, five elephants died because of poissoned darts . After this incident, more than 200 forest guards and four platoons of Provincial Armed Constabulary have been posted there. Later, three persons were arrested and seven people have been questioned. And one person was found with a gun. Investigations are going on. The CBI also is very much at it.

SHRI SHANKAR ROY CHOWDHURY: Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would request the Minister, through you, to let us know what steps have been taken by his Ministry to stamp out the trade in birds, which is seen in almost all the markets in all the cities. I can speak about my city where this practice is there. It is also there in Delhi and other States. So, what steps is the Ministry taking to ensure that this prohibited trade is stamped out?

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Actually, we intimate the international organisation, the CITES, about the illegal trade. Our offices are there in all the airports. They interact with the customs officials. Many cases have been identified and legal proceedings have been launched.

SHRI T.N. CHATURVEDI: Sir, recently, a number of peacocks died in the villages nearby Delhi as well. And I understand, there is only one birds' hospital, which is run by a philanthropic Jain organisation. There is no Government hospital even in Delhi. That is

why my question to the hon. Minister is: Has his Ministry any information whether hospitals equipped with proper technical expertise, medicines, etc. for treatment of birds do exist in different places? And what aid is his Ministry giving for starting these hospitals specifically meant for birds? Also, will he ensure that at least in Delhi, we have a much better arrangement for treatment of any such cases.

SHRI T.R. BAALU: There is no such request from the Government of Delhi. But, at the same time, if the Delhi Government approaches the Central Zoo Authority, I am very much interested in providing all the necessary financial and other assistance.

SHRI T.N. CHATURVEDI: I would like to know the general policy throughout the country because it is not the question of peacocks only—which, of course, is our National Bird—but of all other birds. There have been long write-ups saying that they have been dying for different reasons. But there is no proper analysis and nothing definite is known. That is why I have put this specific question to the hon. Minister.

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Sir, we have veterinary hospitals throughout the country. It is only through these veterinary hospitals and surgeons that we are doing *post mortem*, etc. Any way, it is a good suggestion. We will definitely take note of the hon. Member's suggestion and see to it that assistance is rendered, if the State Governments come forward.

SHRI T.N. CHATURVEDI: Sir, as I read in these write-ups, these veterinary hospitals and surgeons are more for other animals, very few of them try to specialise, so far as treatment of birds is concerned. That is why I have made this specific request.

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Sir, there are a lot of ornithologists throughout the country. At the same time, as of now, such cases are being dealt with by veterinary hospitals. If there is any specific suggestion, the hon. member can pass it on to me and I will see to it that it is carried out.